

VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF MAHABHARATA  
*(My visual narration on crucial incidents on Mahabharata)*

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## ABSTRACT

Mahabharata is a painting with mythological details which is narrating the incidents. It is combination of 16 minutes 34 seconds storytelling and 3 minutes rap song which supports the 73 x 60 cm long water colour painting. This work consists of contemporary and also conventional ideas, which provides the permutation of mythological art. This painting has many characters from epic in action that foretells important incidents. The aim of the thesis is to convey cultural and philosophical inkling through visual interpretation of 3000 years old epic. It is a pictorial revolution towards the post-colonial and modern societies emulating rigid restrictions defining about good and evil. The art work aims to liberate the concept of traditional boundaries. The objective is to deliver a message that metaphysical realm has more magnitude than towards the religious interpretation. The recipient of this art work is inflexible socio-cultural societies with rigorous political and religious norms. Additionally, this theme intends to discuss the philosophy on human virtues and nature as persistent embody of life and death.

The thesis consists a painting which operates as a bridge between contemporary and traditional art form. The artwork enhances Tibetan, Nepalese and Indian art formats which manipulates the characters in geometrical and symbolic forms. It uses background symbols like blood bath, two pyramids intersecting each other and wheel of life.

This work implicates and fabricates culture and contemporary art history. It serves purpose of pursuing freedom for interpreting without political and religious perimeter in art work. It compiles the sequence of stories under one panel. The rhythm and poetic song are the modern method of concluding this epic. It highlights the main incident in humorous and satirical way. Correspondingly, it contains the retelling of multilayered epic for new audience. It also helps to simplify and illuminate this epic as a mythology. Furthermore, it delivers morale and freedom of revolting against prejudices about right and wrong in our societies.

**Keywords** visual interpretation, contemporary art, painting, mythological art, narrative storytelling, rhythm and poem

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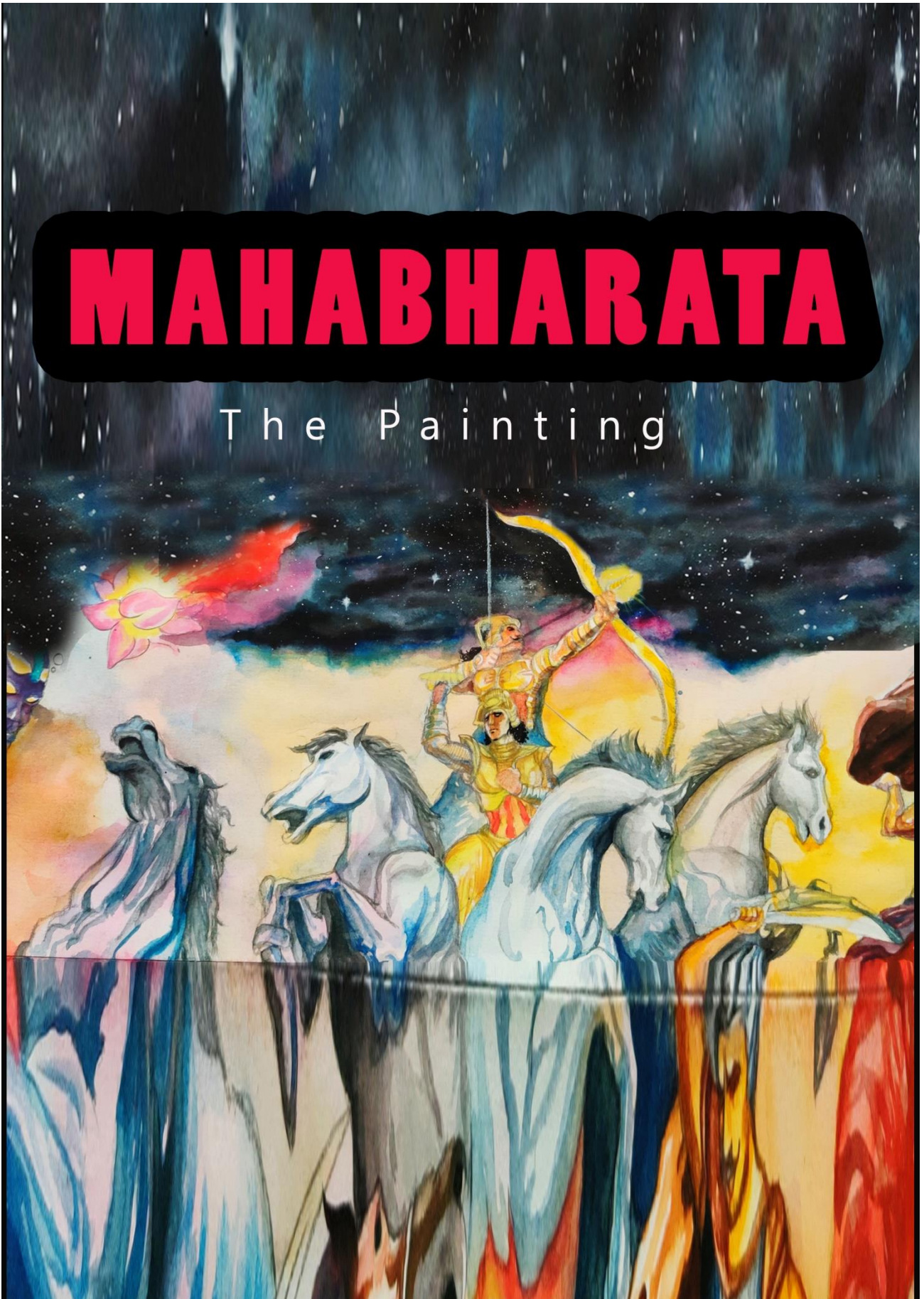
Especially, I want to thank my friends and family members; I have experienced so much with you. Without all of your perspectives and ideas together, I would never have felt so deeply about Mahabharata and its cultural significances; and this thesis would never have happened.

Lastly and most importantly, I want to thank all the amazing sociological seminars on post-colonial societies, my teachers and mentors from Nepal who took the time to answer my artistic questions, and provided me with amazing, rich stories with academic sources. Thank you for handing me an opportunity to express my freedom of my visual interpretation on this well-known epic. I would not have been able to combine socio-cultural viewpoints into contemporary art forms without your support and ideas behind this work.

Thank you.

# MAHABHARATA

The Painting



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis is product-based thesis. It consists of one painting which will narrate the epic of Mahabharata and Vishwaroopa<sup>1</sup> (the face of universe), narrating the painting in form of storytelling and Rap song based on the great war. The painting will primarily focus on storytelling on the Pandavas<sup>2</sup> and Kauravas<sup>3</sup> who core characters of Mahabharata. The concept is to keep aside the religious values and highlighting its aesthetics on philosophical means. Mahabharata is the Hindu epic which provides tools and understanding about life experiences in the form of short stories. It is the compilation of short stories with moral values and experiences providing ethical meaning and tools for living in life. The story is originally foretold by Vedvyas<sup>4</sup> and written by the Hindu elephant god Ganesha with his broken tusk. On one hand, for the western society and non-Hindu community people Mahabharata is interpreted as compilation of mystical ethnic stories which is complicated and interesting at the same point. On the other hand: every Hindu follows Geeta and Mahabharata as one of the core philosophies to continue life.

As an enthusiast artist, I have grown up listening short stories of Mahabharata. According to my understanding it is impossible to interpret this epic perfectly neither visually nor verbally. However, I am honored to present this project as my thesis work because it corresponds the problems I faced during my studies when I experienced identity crisis as an artist and as a student. After immigrating to Finland, I was trying to find balance between different art mediums. Initially being a Thangka traditional artist, I was struggling to find contemporary artistic distinctiveness which introduced me to explore my own version of my work. I find this epic as a contemporary platform where I could combine my traditional artistic skills with new ideas because Mahabharata is an ancient story with modern values. I have painted the important incidents of the war which is fascinating for me as a visual interpreter in this painting. Additionally, it is a contemporary concept of combining all the epic; war incidents under one panel which has never been done before. Furthermore, in this painting, I was able to combine traditional technique with contemporary art form.

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<sup>1</sup> Vishwaroopa: When Krishna was enlightening Arjuna, the visual narration about universe during war.

<sup>2</sup> Pandavas: Five brothers who are the sons of King Pandu, Kunti and Madri who fought against their cousins kauravas.

<sup>3</sup> Kauravas: Hundred brothers who fought against Pandavas in the war and cousins to Pandavas. They are the sons of King Dhritarastra and Gandhari.

<sup>4</sup> Vedvyas: Famous Hindu sage and writer of Mahabharata.

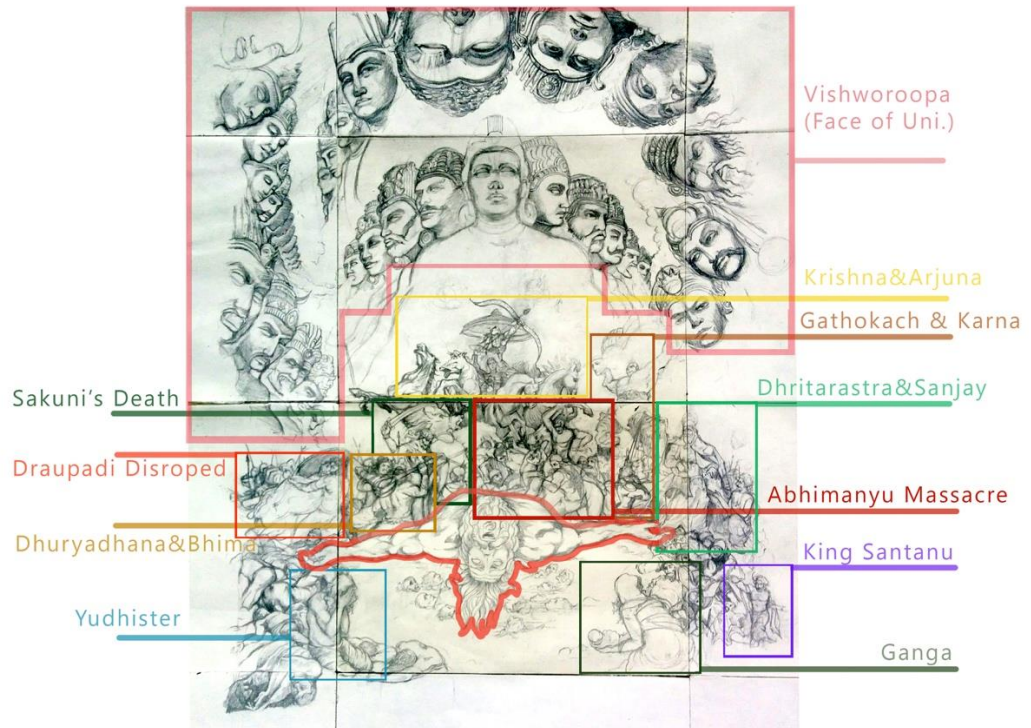


This mythical epic is interpreted and translated many times through various ideologies, perspectives during past generations and this is my visual interpretation. This water paint in paper 73 X 60 cm, consists of illustrations which are based on Mahabharata war. The painting is about war which was fought for eighteen days between Kauravas and Pandavas. The characters in the art are chosen because of the morale and virtues they carry during the war. Each character symbolizes enthralling short stories which is culturally provoking and connects the epic story from beginning to the end. Hence, in order to narrate the epic based on my painting, I felt the necessity of storytelling as part of my art work. It aims to provide verbal synopsis for audience who are not familiar with the epic Mahabharata. The narration of the epic through my painting will be 16 minutes 34 seconds audio. The characters and the painting will be explained in that time frame. However, narrating Mahabharata in 16 minutes 34 seconds is challenging and tedious task but it provides the texture to my art work which helps to understand the story behind the painting.

The story of Mahabharata is well-known to the Hindu families in Nepal and India. It is a folklore which is passed by generations to provide moral values for children and adult. Mahabharata, as I explained earlier has a multi-layered storyline with modern values with thought-provoking characters. It is noteworthy that this epic consists of grey characters victimized by unpleasant circumstances. However, I grew up only listening to the better versions of the story which for me as an adult is a revelation the other way around. Every time I understood the epic it provided me with new conclusions and perspectives. Therefore, I have written a satirical rhythm and poetry (RAP) based on Mahabharata. It is a 3 minutes audio music which consists of sarcastic poem to the epic and key characters of Mahabharata. It is a contemporary conclusion with different perspective on storyline of Mahabharata. The lyrics of my rap song represent the freedom in art form to interpret as a revolution against rigid Hindu social frame. It is the process where I intend to express my personal understanding of the epic. The lyrics of the Rap music recite the hypocrisy, irony, injustice, vengeance etc. of the characters in humorous way. It is a part of my analysis which provokes ancient cultural interpretation in the countries like India and Nepal.



## 1.1 THE CHARACTERS OF THE STORY



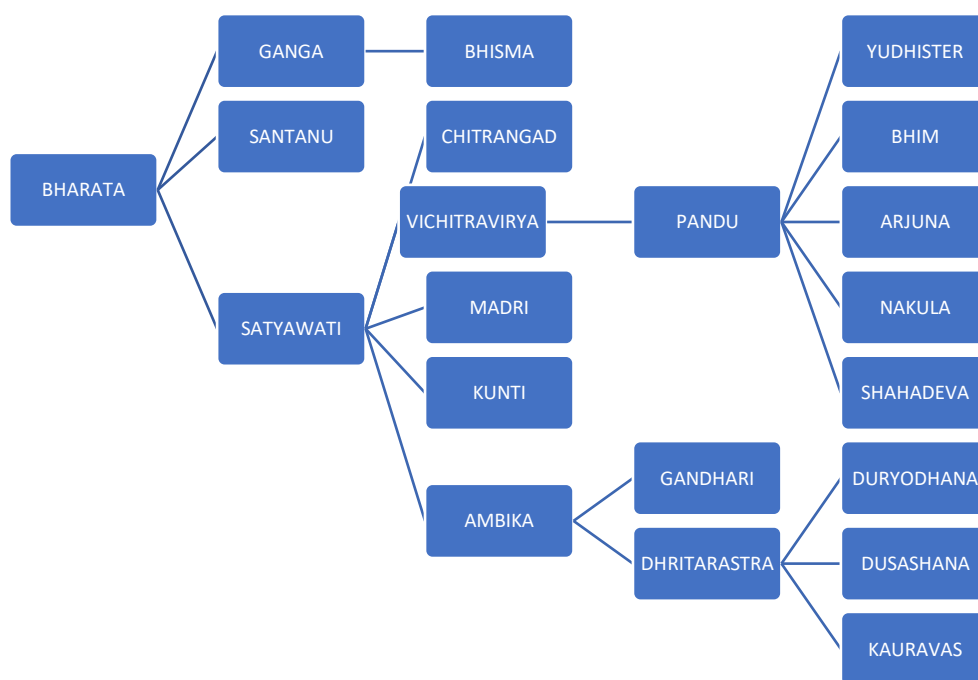
Picture . Characters of the epic Mahabharata (My painting draft, 2018 -2019)

To understand the painting, narration and the rap song: it is important to understand the characters of the epic briefly. Hence, I am explaining the epic in gist.

Mahabharata as an epic poem has many characters. The poem has unique story because there is no antagonist in it. The original language of this epic is written in old Sanskrit which is regarded as the one of the oldest languages in the world. It is believed that the story was dictated by the sage named Ved vyas in the bank of Ganga river. Whereas it was believed to be written by Ganesha, Hindu god of wisdom. The story of Mahabharata was believed to be written by Ganesha with his broken tusk. This epic that comprises of hundred thousand stanzas of verses divided into eighteen books.. The story embodies in the land named Hastinapur (Present day part of India) with the family riots and jealousy. In this land there are

two brothers Pandu and Dhritarastra. The elder brother, Dhritarastra was a blind and Pandu the younger one, was cursed. Since the country could not have disabled king, Pandu was elected as the king but was cursed to die when consummated with wife. Hence, the story is about the great war which is fought between the sons of Pandu and Dhritarastra for their rights towards throne. The family tree for the kingdom of Hastinapur can be portrayed in the following table. This table is important for understanding the epic from the beginning till the end. Therefore, it will give a clear picture why and for what reasons the Mahabharat happened in the first place.

The war of Mahabharata is fought between families, the family of Kauravas and Pandavas. However, to understand the war and sequence of incidents, it is crucial to explain the family tree of Pandavas and Kauravas which does not include wives and children of Pandavas and Kauravas enlisted as follows:



Picture 2. It is the table of family tree to understand the background of Pandavas and Kauravas.

The story unfolds when Pandu has untimely death causes Dhritarastra obliged to be King of the kingdom. The fight for the right candidate to the throne, follow when Dhritarastra's sons try to kill the sons of Pandu. The continuous enmity between the two families and unfolding short stories showing the jealousy and fights is the final result of the great war in the epic named Mahabharat.

The art work focus on the important incidents which created the platform for the great war in Hindu.

### **1.1.1 THE AUTHOR: VEDVYASA**

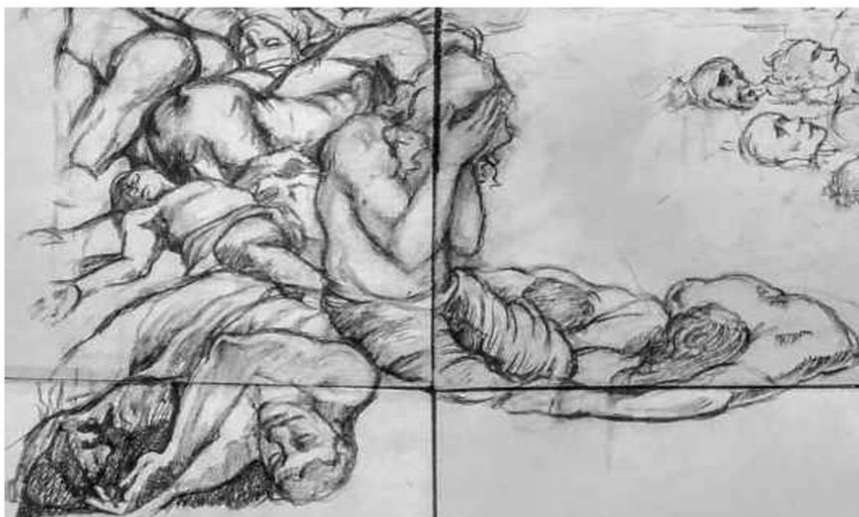
It is believed that Ved Vyasa is the foremost first compiler of Mahabharata, and an important character in, the epic of Mahabharata, It is believed that he was original writer for Vedic knowledge from oral tradition available in written form. He was the son of Satyawati adopted daughter of the fisherman Dusharaj and the wandering sage Parashara who is credited with being the author of the first Purana, Vishnu Puran (mythological saying about Hindu God Vishnu). According to the Vishnu Purana, Vyasa was born on an island of the Yamuna at Kalpi.

Following the legend, in a previous life Vyasa was the Sage Apantaratamas, who was born when Lord Vishnu uttered the syllable "Bhu". He was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Since birth, he already possessed the knowledge of the Vedas, the Dharmashastras and the Upanishads. At Vishnu's behest, he was reborn as Vyasa.

Sage Parashara was the father of Vyasa and the grandson of Sage Vashistha. Prior to Vyasa's birth, Parashara had performed a severe penance to Lord Shiva. Shiva granted a boon that Parashara's son would be a Brahmarshi equal to Vashistha and would be famous for his knowledge. Parashara begot Vyasa with Satyawati. She conceived and immediately gave birth to Vyasa. Vyasa became an adult and left, promising his mother that he would come to her when needed.

Vyasa is believed to have lived on the banks of Ganga in modern-day Uttarakhand. The site was also the ritual home of the sage Vashishta, along with the Pandavas, the five brothers of the Mahabharata.

### **1.1.2 THE PANDAVAS**



Picture 3: Yudhister and his four brothers lying dead before the poisonous pool.  
(Detailing of my painting draft, 2018 August)



Picture 4: Yudhister sobbing pool. (Detailing of colour, 2020.)

Pandavas are the five demi God children sons of Kunti, Madri and Panadu. Three by Kunti and two by Madri, became known as Pandavas. Collectively the five sons had the five qualities of the perfect King namely: honesty, strength, skill, beauty and wisdom.

Pandavas are regarded as the ethical and family with morale. When the epic unfolds and short stories tell that they are not the best characters in the epic: meaning they have darker shades of their characters and are also victims of unwanted circumstances.

### **1.1.3 THE KAURAVAS**

The kauravas are the hundred sons of Gandhari and Dhritarastra. The epic shows that the story of miraculous birth of Gandhari's children which in modern day was produced through test tube babies. As a rationalist, Gandhari had two sons namely Duryodhana and Dusashana who play an important role in the epic. In the epic, Kauravas are with the dark and bad characters : meaning they have darker shades in their characters but while the epic unfolds they are the characters who are fair and with protagonist characters.

### **1.1.4 THE BHISMA**

Bhishma is the guardian character of Hastinapur but also godfather of Kauravas and also Pandavas. He was the original heir of the kingdom Hastinapur until he announces to be virgin through out his whole life and lets his father King Santanu get married to his love. This promise makes him the main reason and a platform for the greatest battle fought in Asian land. Hence, in the panel he is symbolically; the foundation of the war and the bloodshed.





Picture 6, Bhishma being the foundation of the Mahabharata war, he is symbolically the reason for the blood bath. ( details sketch of Bhisma lying as blood bath, 2018.

### 1.1.5 THE DRAUPADI

Draupadi is the common wife for the Pandavas. It sounds absurd, but she was the original and the main queen of the five brothers. The brothers happened to share the wife. Here, the queen of the great five brothers were disrobed in public and for her vengeance the war was fought too.



Picture 7, (Sketch of draupadi getting disrobed by dushasana, 2018)



Picture 8, Sketches study of Draupadi, 2016.





Picture 9, Sketches of Ganga going to drowning the baby, 2018

#### **1.1.6 KING SANTANU AND GANGA**

King Santanu and Ganga are the parents of Bhisma. The initial story of King Shantanu and Ganga and their intimacy is the start of the epic Mahabharata.

### 1.1.7 THE KRISHNA



Picture 10, Sketch version of Krishna as Charioteer, 2018.



Picture 11, Krishna and Arjun with a bow, 2020.

Krishna is the important character who is the nephew of Kunti, mother of Pandavas. Here in this epic, Krishna plays important diplomatic role to organize this whole war. He is the mediator and also a trigger for the greatest battle Mahabharata.

### 1.1.8 VISHWAROOPA, FACE OF THE UNIVERSE



Picture 12. Sketch of Face of Universe, 2018.





Picture 13. Face of Universe, 2020.

It is the semi-circle of the various faces. Vishwaroopa is the diversified faces which consist of various elements of nature and its phases. It consists of layers of faces which are painted as demonic, human, old, alien like: the layers are painted to show the fact of infinity and beyond understanding for the audience. It is the part of the painting which is contemporary yet traditional. The inspiration of the painting is taken from ancient Mahabharata painting from unknown artist and has been modified into contemporary look.

## 1.2 INCIDENTS IN THE MAHABHARATA

### 1.2.1 CONVERSATION BETWEEN ARJUNA AND KRISHNA

Exact moment before war, Arjuna one of the brother of Pandavas refuse to fight he war where he is supposed to kill all his relatives and cousins on the battlefield. This is the very moment when Krishna enlightens Arjun that the relations, love, hate and other virtues of mankind is mere an illusionary thing which makes life as a journey. Krishna is the diplomatic character who is war mediator and also reason for the greatest battle.

This incident is in the center of the painting which embarks the beginning of the battlefield. I have personally painted the center characters in the beginning because even though it is the major characters and important incident, the knowledge which Arjuna gets from Krishna is more important than them themselves.

### 1.2.2 GANGA DROWNING THE NEW BORN CHILD



Picture 14. Sketch of Ganga 2018.





Picture 15: Ganga drowning the child, King Santanu trying to stop (Detailing of my painting, 2020)

Ganga and Santanu are the newly married couple in the beginning of the epic. Before the marriage: Santanu vows to Ganga that whatever she will do in the future, he will never complain nor question her actions. So, after the first child, Ganga takes away the child and drowns the first and repeats till she has her seventh son. On the eighth son, King Santanu stops Ganga and says it is impossible for him to see his children drowning in the water. Thus, Ganga takes his eighth son and says he will turn as a curse to his whole dynasty. This incident I have painted on the side of the painting because, that child later becomes Bhishma and he is the reason for origin and end of the battle Mahabharata.

### 1.2.3 DUSHASAN DISROBING DRAUPADI



Picture 16. Draupadi getting disrobed by Dushashana on water colour, 2020.

Dushashana is Duryodhana's beloved brother out of his hundred others. On the incident where Pandavas lose their whole kingdom and even their wife. During the time when Draupadi was having her menstruation, Dushashana disrobes her in front of the royal court.

I chose this incident because, Draupadi as the queen of the Pandavas and new kingdom Indraprastha was disrobed and molested during her vulnerable period in front of the royal court. I regard Draupadi as an ancient symbol of feminism. Her vengeance created the scenario of Mahabharata. She was the lead character which caused Pandavas fight against the Kauravas.



#### 1.2.4 FIGHT BETWEEN GATOKACH AND KARNA



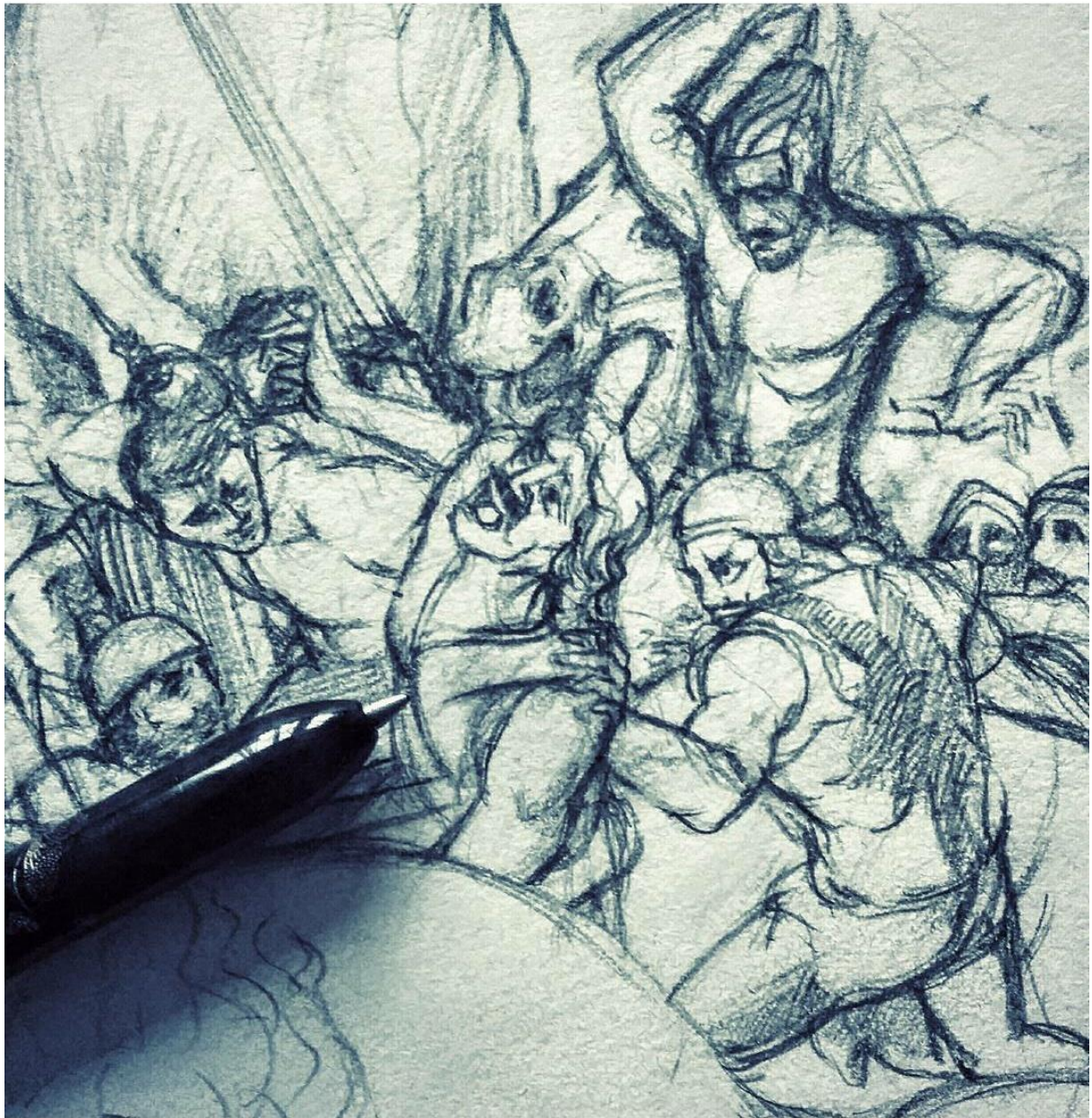
Picture 8: Gatokach about to kill Karna and Karna aiming his bow and nuclear arrow towards Gatokach. (Detailing of my painting draft on the left, 2016)  
(On the right, detail of the water colour ,2020)

Gatokach was the giant who was the son of Bhima another brother of Pandavas. He was gaint and the most powerful character during the war. Pandavas use Gatokach as a weapon to save themselves from the nuclear power which is possessed by Karna; the best friend of Duryodhana. In order to save the Pandavas and let the ultimate weapon possessed by Kaurava be destroyed through Gatokach. This incident symbolizes human sacrifices for relationships which only lead to destruction and formation of something new in the universe scenario.





jesuskomail



(Detailing of my painting draft, 2016) Sources;- Instagram @jesuskomail.





Picture 9: (Abhimanyu massacred detail of the water colour ,2020)

### 1.2.5 ABHIMANYU'S MASSACRE

Abhimanyu was the son of Arjuna, he was the smartest and the youngest in the war. He was trapped in the battlefield which was originally meant for Arjuna. In order to save Arjun from the death, Abhimanyu decides to stand brave and go inside the trap of battlefield. He eventually gets massacred by the seven bold and great warriors. Hence, it goes against the rule of the war. On one hand it is the injustice for Abhimanyu whereas on the other hand it is complete failure of nature of Karma because Abhimanyu is the symbol of innocence and bravery in the battle of Mahabharata.

This incident is the most important part of the painting because it symbolizes injustice to good and death to the brave soul. It was the most unfair incident in the whole battle of

Mahabharata. I intend to paint that under the universe and its cycle everything is fair. The definition of unfair and fair doesnot mean anything under the nature of birth and death.

### 1.2.6 BHISMA'S DEATH

Bhisma was killed by his favourite godson Arjuna. He was trapped and conspired to death by his own. He is the foundation for the battle of Mahabharata therefore, his head and body are painted in the upper end of the painting. His body is the baseline for the whole battle and beyond his death lies only destruction. Bhisma being the kindest, honorable and brave warrior still dead and tking blood bath is very symbolic in terms of life.

I painted his painting in the foundation of the battle because he being the best and the strongest character also was unintentionally became the reason for this great battle Mahabharata.

Picture 10, Study sketches of Bhisma, 2018







Picture 11. Bhisma detail on blood bath, 2020.

### 1.3 ABOUT THE PRODUCT THESIS

The painting is symbolically divided into two parts. The first half has circles of faces which surrounds the painting, it shows the various forms of universe named Vishwaroopa (face of the universe). In this part, the painting is all about the universe, from black hole to pyramids, flying elephants etc. It shows the thousand faces of universe. Its appearances in the painting is about diversity, which revokes the prejudices and rigid interpretation of good-evil, demonic-angelic etc. For my understanding for universe, it does not have any linear understanding of worldly values like life-death, good-evil etc. I intend to visually illuminate the concept of rigid restrictions on humankind that does not exist for universe. Here in this painting, I intend to paint that universe is neutral about life and death. The process is mere a part of its molecule particles in its existence.

Similarly, another half of the painting includes the blood bath. It is the symbol of violence and sequence of war deaths. Symbolically, deaths in the paintings are in ratio of 1:1 when it comes to producing new versus killing the old. The deaths have series of short incidents where every demise has a short story behind. The list of incidents is aligned, and every character's death are symbolically metaphors for virtues of mankind.

The crying characters in the painting also signifies the grieving in the lifetime which only comes with the manly virtues. On the center of the painting, there is horse chariot and two important characters of the epic namely Arjuna and Krishna. This is the utmost important part of epic Mahabharata because of the conversation between these two characters which merely creates the beginning of the great war.

Mythical histories are helpful in relating future aspects in social and cultural form. Hence, the process of making this painting is to make series of short stories of epic reflecting the history and the space. Competing with past generations and artistic analysis, I painted my version of understanding Mahabharata. Thus, it is an artistic liberation to express my cultural and visual standpoints through my art work.

This is also the modern form of retelling the epic in secular form. While retelling this epic through the painting it will highlight the incidents where social prejudices and problems were vigilant and expressive even 3000 years ago. From the incident of Queen's molestation to King killing his own nephews are painted. The list of incidents for instance the death of Bhishma reveals for evil when doing good. The essence of senses and analyzing the human perspectives are expressed during narrating the epic and rap song.

As an artist, I found it is challenging to surface this painting under one panel. It is a vague topic and multiple interpretations from many generations. It not only fascinated me but also challenged my artistic instincts to experiment contemporary art with traditional topic. However, I have simplified it under minimalistic form through choosing important incidents. The idea to understand the understanding is very compelling and also very useful during drafting and painting. The perspective used when making this painting is concerned about life and death. It includes the values that universe presents every living being in this realm. Since

the characters of the epic are all important and there are no protagonist or antagonist in this epic which inspired me to choose this multi layered epic for my painting.

## **2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS**

### **2.1 WHAT IS NEW?**

Mahabharata and Vishwaroop is an epic which is well known among locals in Nepal and in India. It is a common folk tale which most of the families share with the children for morale values. The Hindu society aware yet confused about this great epic is not a new news in current Hindu society. Foretelling this great epic was not an easy choice for this thesis. It is vague, deep and provides aesthetic meaning to life, living goals and questions the cultural formation. Most of the people who know this epic well, have questioned me about; ‘what is new in my thesis?’. After deep analysis I realized that foretelling this epic via my art is the symbolic representation and differentiation between religion and culture. In this product thesis I will be talking about the important incidents which happened thousand years ago yet so real and complicated till date. I will be painting the face of universe which will express the deaths and births as part of natural process. The thesis talks about the man-made culture such as ego, jealousy, success, loss, love-hate etc. complicates the key morale of nature that are mere feelings which are consequences towards adjusting with the social and cultural norms. My art works will have will include the painting where virtues of life will be portrayed inform of short incidents and it will provide open platform for discussions and brainstorming during the story telling process. Therefore, to answer the question about what is new in this thesis as for foretelling the epic is that, it includes important incidents in the painting and each incident will represent virtues of humankind with no religious significance and no representation on God and Godly characters. Additionally, the storytelling will have no protagonist. The idea is to represent faith and religion is mere man-made creation to control over mankind. Humans embody whole universe in themselves, as every creation is part of this vast universe. Every single molecule is part of the of birth and death cycle, meaning: destruction and construction is part of existence of this universe.

The painting will have symbolic representation where the epic will have characters with their significant stories. Additionally, every incident of particular character will carry virtue sof life



in form of stories. After reading many religious and non-religious interpretations on Mahabharata, I realized this epic consist of symbolic and poetic representation which were interpreted by many sages and saints in the time duration for their benefit which gradually changed the formation of society. However, this epic refines the meaning of loss and profit, war and peace in a contemporary way. This epic is about war between brothers which brings destruction and chaos among each other. The interesting character names Krishna is painted as a philosopher and diplomat who convinces another character named Arjuna saying life is for working on actions and fighting against the circumstances, relationships, human feelings are mere man-made creations which do not mean anything for universe. Hence, for universe we are molecule particles who are born and will die in timespan. Additionally, my painting will embrace Krishna as a guide to Arjuna. During this war epic, many characters who were innocent- young and naïve lose their lives for vain individualistic ego and obsessed agony. My story-telling will focus on antagonist part of Krishna and Arjuna which is ignored by most of the old narratives of Mahabharata for cultural and religious reasons. My painting has no antagonist or protagonist: every single character will have grey shades which develops sympathy and hatred for all characters. This is the new concept that I have developed for this work. As I understood during the research process that in life, nothing matters as war, struggle or even success we face or gain during life span is just a mere aesthetic journey towards death, we are particles who survives the cycle of development and destruction. We are the minor wheels in the bigger cycle of universe.

## 2.2 WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ABOUT THIS PAINTING?

*'Stated bluntly, the task of theory in the age of the avant-garde has been, infact to provide the means for explaining how the myriad of modern subversions of traditional expectations about art-or at least some thereof-could count as art.'*- Noel Carroll 1994.pg. 27

When agreeing with Noel Carroll 1994, I was having conflicting discussions with many of my friends and art curators during the process of making my painting, many acclaimed it not to be contemporary at all and some questioned my concepts and methods. However, we are entering art history with new ideas. I am not planning to copy but trying to improvise with total revision. It is experience like someone's ideas going through my new mind. I claim it to be the contemporary art because it consists of symbolic representation showing great knowledge. At least I want to introduce something new that is close to me. As every line and

everything I do has a background history. After I was introduced to contemporary art that sort of changed how I look the traditional art. And I started thinking about something outside the tradition. When I was also contemplating my artistic practice: the increase in marketing, huge billboard, movie posters representing a story in a single panel influenced me to connect with this method. So, for me the traditional works were becoming more like commodity rather than object of venerations.

*'What is about the contemporary painting that keeps the art alive? It is not just that people continue to paint or we continue to label what they paint 'art'. Art survives not only because people keep painting but because historically individuated sets of painting continue to be the focus of complex enfranchising normative social practice. The details of the social practice and the types of things upon which it is focused provide an answer to this question enables us to understand why art has lost none of its significance.'* (George W.S. Bailey 1930, pg.160)

Agreeing with George W.S. Bailey, I personally think the concept of contemporary art is based on the norms and values used in the art work. The painting represents freedom from traditional concept. As a painter or visual artist, I am trying to create a single image with sufficient details to represent multilayered epic like Mahabharata. The color and geometrical significance connect traditional art with contemporary form.

The painting is inspired by many modern and old masters such as Michael Angelo, Jack Kirby and Frank Fra zetta. Here, my sources of inspiration exemplify different art background, for instance with Michael Angelo's concept of heaven and hell in Sistine Chapel, Jack Kirby illustrated Hinduism characters in comics: I felt it was putting Jazz music in Rock concert and Frank Fra zetta inspired the choreography and structures of his paintings. Hence, in my painting, I have combined the Western and Eastern traditional art with illustrations.

The geometrical symbolism is also another formation for this painting. The upward and downward intersection of pyramids which is explained in the process of the painting also explains about the modern concept about narrating the epic in minimalistic form.

### 2.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE SHORT STORIES IN SYMBOLIC WAY

Symbolism is in fact the basic human need. A symbol can move or inspire, or it can work more mysteriously, speaking to our unconscious and stirring us at a deep level of intuitive wisdom. To understand symbols is to obtain a profound insight into what it means to be human.

So far, we have spoken of symbol making from a modern, western perspective, while implying that the ideas expressed are universally valid. Yet some of our intellectual horizons are culturally determined. Differences of belief and social practice, as well as environmental differences including climate, landscapes flora and fauna take our conscious and unconscious minds in different evolutionary directions. Belief systems and cultural influences intersect, complicates the picture. (David Fontana, 2010, Pg.16).

Symbols are very important to traditional artistic viewpoints. When we talk about epic and mythologies, I chose this topic based on different shades of stories. The objective to introduce important stories under one panel, those are part of the human virtues that are symbolically and culturally related to any color and race. Keeping religion aside and highlighting philosophy of life was the main objective of this painting which is acceptable among people from different races and continents. For instance, in my painting the face of the universe is simple when we keep under one phrase: *'one who is constructed will be destructed.'* The face of the universe: Vishwaroop is a symbolic representation that every being is the universe in itself which poses power of creation and destruction in its life frame.

The chosen incidents from Mahabharata has significant aims because every incident represent virtues of mankind. These stories are simple representation of emotions and virtues we live by everyday which are jealousy, love, hatred, insecurities, temptations etc. These emotional virtues are the key factors for cultural and moral background which we live by, therefore: these aspects are symbolically epitomized in this art piece.

### 3. PROCESS OF THE PRODUCT THESIS

#### 3.1 ABOUT THE PAINTING

The concept behind the painting is to set up the whole different chosen specific incidents under one big platform. The idea of the painting is to blend different stories in one.

This thesis concentrates on the process to make the one image including the designing and the formation based on its story. My art includes fabricating different stories and choreographing spaces. The elements which are displayed in painting are carefully selected, created and rehabilitated for narrating the battlefield. The painting will visually narrate epic providing the morale values to their virtues. The visual representation of the upper part of the painting Viswaroopu signifies the nature and universe. The details of painting is different from traditional concept. Through this art, it invites the viewer into a process of self-renewal and awareness as it explores the intricacies of human relationships and the ways that brokenness can give way to redemption and healing. The chosen incidents of Mahabharata will explain why justice and vengeance is part of human society and life cycle. It will also embrace that universe is above mankind and also its virtues which does not signifies in the timeline of life and death.

This painting and its purpose are to capture single moments of stillness in the battle full of fraught with tension, emotion and vulnerability.

I create the painting as a tool to narrate the epic, with the cultural and philosophical meaning. The characters in the painting are primarily composed of a palette of muted, neutral tones in which it includes careful selection of dark, saturated hues and colour. The colour combination has natural light and also dark blue etc. The use of lighting colours symbolizes to the persistent hope brought after the destruction and blood bath, even in the darkest situations. One the contrary, the dark colours of the blood bath and the top resembles the dark reality of death destruction.

The painting frames series of characters' image into balanced, symmetrical, one-point two opposite pyramid perspectives views, forcing the audience to confront the scene directly. In spaces that seem starkly familiar, the illustration introduces the epic through the relationships of the human characters to one another, the use of pictorial elements to exaggerate limbs and figures and the creation of visual narration which will reshape the meaning of the epic in different perspectives.

The scenes that I have composed bear similarities to theatrical sets and give the audience a glimpse into ongoing mythological stories during the battle. Each piece of the composition is carefully selected and arranged and is necessary to understand the narrative. Every fabricated illustration validates and enriches an aspect of the stories or characters shown. Finally, finished picture of character invites the audience to examine the complexities of the figures portrays through the lens of their own relationships, experiences, and perceptions about life and its emotional virtues.

These carefully created illustration and selected incidents pf the battle of Mahabharta as. Contemporary work also set a stage for the audience to question and examine the hidden realities of their own lives and meaning of good-evil. Therefore, the painting is an experiment which foretells the story using the freedom to express and interpret in my personal understanding. Ancient temples of Nepal and the terracotta archaeological photographs are also source of inspiration for development and formation of characters in the painting. Movies like Starwars, Marvel comics and Sci-fictional movies are also source of inspiration for creating the universe. I wished to take inspiration from sources which were near me to create something visibly contrasting ancient Mahabharata art series but at the same time I aimed that viewers could relate my visual narration from the old version which they knew.

### 3.1.1 COLOURS AND THE OUTLOOK

Life is a stream of color. Red, blue, yellow, and a billion pigments in between! The concept of my color is to absorb everything that is good around me to retaining some of my old identities. As for the viewers, it is a figurative mood, narrating scenes in details with Technicolor day dream. Colour helped me to organize the stages of the panel more clearly. It is interesting for me to see the reactions from viewers of the traditional taste in contemporary scene. Color represent the mood and the concept that I wish to brush my viewers mind for instance red tone is violence, black and blue indicates feeling of infinity, yellow referring the power of knowledge as enlightenment over the cycle. I am examining the moods and the intuitive feelings of the viewers through colorful history.

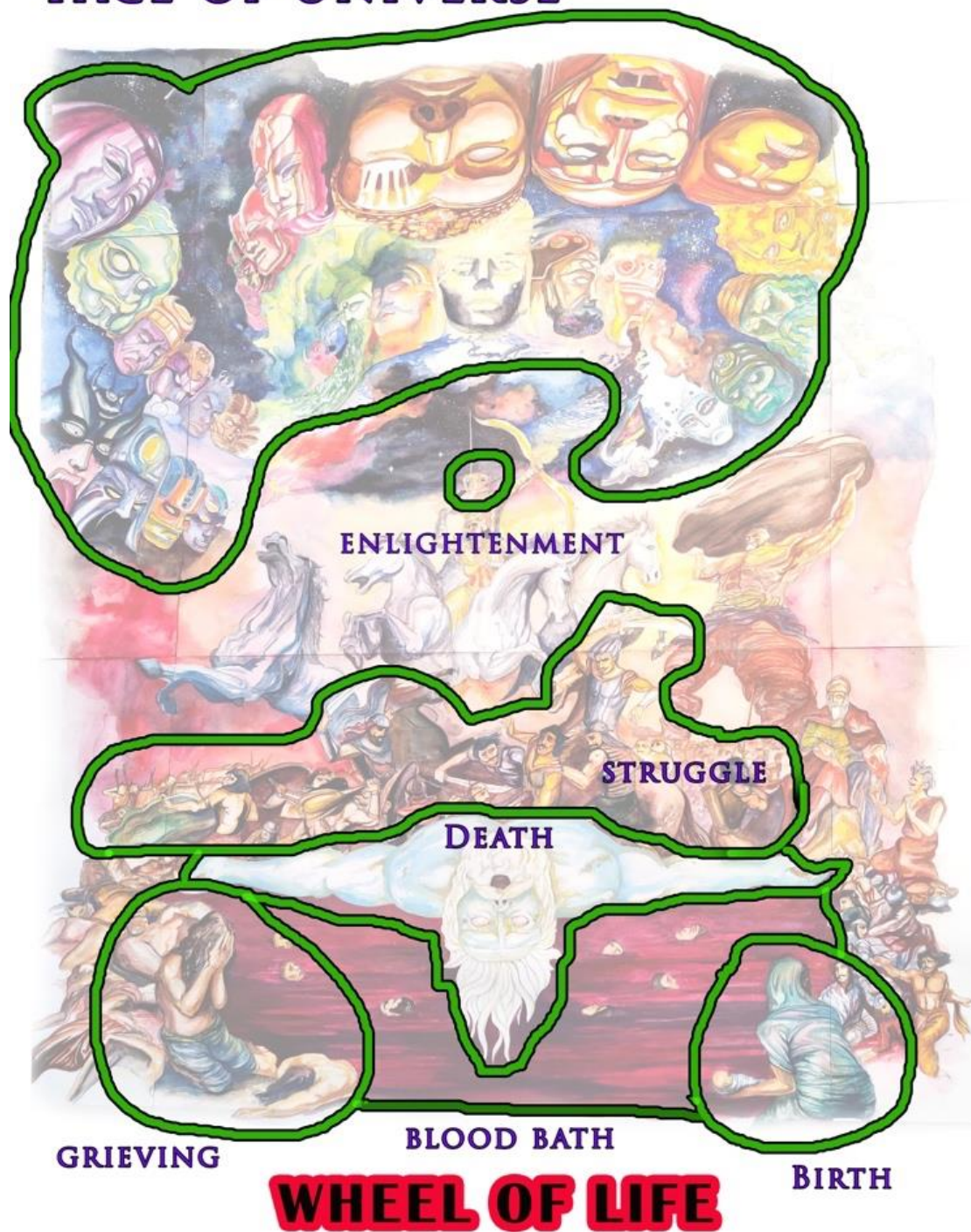
### 3.1.2 POSITION OF THE CHARACTERS

The greatest task was to locate the characters in painting, where and why should characters related in the panel. It was tedious task, however to handle characters as I wanted to represent their personalities. I aimed to label them where it should be illustrated. I needed posture which gives more sense for my subject. The characters are several but yet separated and visible for visual narration and also, I could connect them. However, since it is the visual evidence of a war fought during eighteen days, and different incidents happened in different timeline, the incidents cannot be connected directly but through visual interpretation. I chose subject of every character of the epic to be in specific position. I used the characters which represents their incidents. In order to shorten the storyline. Using the story formation, there are three layers of the painting which are as follows:

1. Bottom blood bath
2. The war characters
3. Top as Face of the universe



## FACE OF UNIVERSE



Picture 9: The position of the characters.

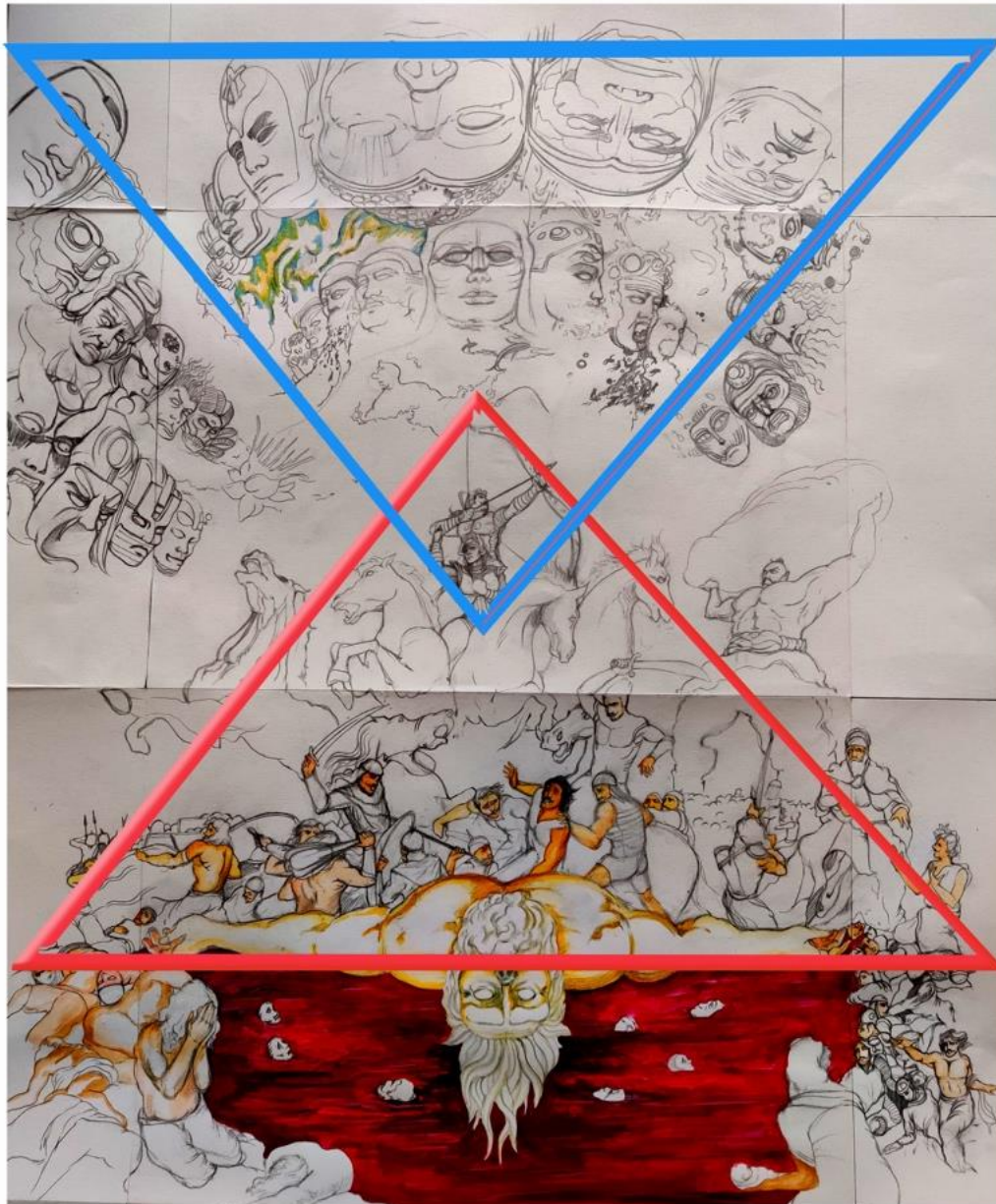
(Analysis of position of characters from the final painting)

The characters in the painting is specifically positioned for wheel of life on the bottom supported by the face of universe on the top.



### 3.1.3 THE PYRAMID METHOD

I chose pyramid method which is ancient technique used in Thangka art. It is the process of storytelling in Tibetan and Newari<sup>6</sup> art culture. Pyramid analysis plays essential role to navigate the story based on the characters with their incidents.



## PYRAMID ANALYSIS

Picture 10: Pyramid technique and analysis (from the incomplete final painting, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Newari: original inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley and ethnic minorities of Nepal.

On the above-mentioned picture, the painting had two triangles intersecting vertically in the character where Krishna as charioteer and Arjun is aiming with his arrow. The Blue pyramid is symbolically representing that the universe is pinning down towards the conversation of Krishna and Arjuna, which symbolizes the destruction. On the contrary, the red pyramid symbolizes the outcome of intersecting characters, where incident causes destruction and the bloodshed; resulting blood bath.

My aim is to maintain equal distance between universe and its different phases of creation and destruction which is also one of the crucial process of natural cycle.

### **3.1.4 BLOOD BATH METHOD**

The bottom foundation of the painting has a old man with his hair open and dead. And his white hair is washed in blood. Below his dead body wave of blood is painted with dead bodies and grieving families. This is the specific detail in the painting because it symbolizes grief and dead in negative aspect whereas red also symbolizes the color of victory meaning universe above the whole incident plans for destruction and even though it is the mourning circumstances for mankind, but it is victory in terms of nature.

The blood bath is a symbol for death. Personally, I believe life and death are the only charisma of nature. This blood bath is symbol of truth behind every life, the universe is brutal because it is an ongoing process where life and death are mere a method to continue life. Hence, mankind and vague memoirs and virtues with emotions do not make sense in bigger picture.

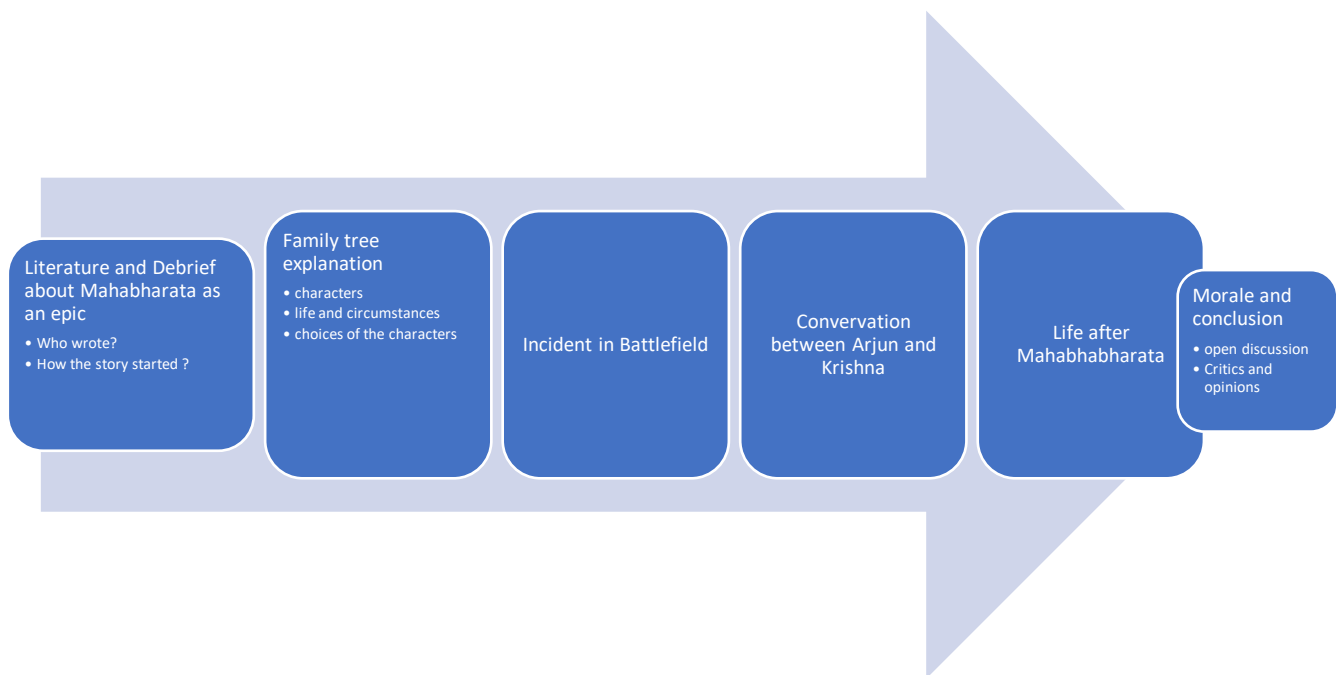
## **3.2 ABOUT HOW TO NARRATE THE STORY**

Narrating the greatest epic like Mahabharata is very complicated to the audience who are not aware of the epic background. There are many characters and every character are intertwined with each other. So, to narrate this visual interpretation to new audience with secular opinion and context will be a new experience.

On answering questions about how I will explain one of the world's famous epic through stories and the painting as a visual narrative tool. With the references of Indian and Nepali mythologists and story tellers, neglecting the details: I will start with the love story of

Shantanu and Ganga where the Bhishma (the blood bath character) and Bhishma as the good devil whose sole purpose was to do good and function according to the morale and ethics of society. The story will unfold from the background of the war characters in the painting including family tree of the two fighting families.

I will narrate the story in short with my personal perspective. The picture of how I will narrate the story is explained in the following chart below:



Picture 11: Process of Mahabharata storytelling ( From my learning diary, 2019)

### 3.2.1 BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Mahabharata as in the battlefield is a series of incidents that are interlinked with each other. The fact about war is winning part always have glory to share and they are winners who have possibility to rewrite the history. However, this epic shares the glory of the losing side where Kauravas miss many chances to win and kill Pandavas because of the promises and the fair play that they decide.

The butterfly effect from the love story of Shantanu and Ganga already embarks the beginning of Mahabharata. Hence, this will be explained during the narration of Mahabharata.

### **3.3 ABOUT THE RAP SONG**

The Rap song is the musical and sarcastic form of the product thesis. It brushes the contemporary form pushing the traditional boundaries for experiencing the freedom of expression. The lyrics are inspired from mythologists' interviews and books which provides secular meaning. It will provide how complicated and post-modern society it was during Mahabharata era.

## **4. LITERATURE REVIEWS AND CRITICAL THINKING**

### **4.1 MAHABHARAT AS A HINDU MYTHOLOGY VS PHILOSOPHY**

Mahabharata is epic which is famous among Hindus. Hinduism is divided into innumerable sects and has no well-defined large-scale ecclesiastic organization. Hindus believe that the soul is eternal but is bound by the law of karma: 'action' to the world of matter, which it can only escape after spiritual progress through an endless series of the births. Different schools and sects have different views about metaphysics and the nature and method of release from transmigration. The Bhagwat Geeta where Mahabharata is a part of the chapter sets three important morale which are: The knowledge of life, selfless devotion towards actions and faith in the universe. These set of morale in these as understood today the path of knowledge implies an awareness the reality is one and spirituality is another. The supreme tranquilization is attained only when the selfless action among the fellow being is performed. The philosophy of Hinduism is embraced with the fact of Karma. This ideology is interpreted in the form of Mahabharata, which consist of no protagonist actions and the faith is questioned and betrayed. This Hindu mythology consist of variation of characters and ideology where every Hindu philosophy is questioned and doubted. For instance, it is the mythology talks about a son renounces sex so that his old father can remarry his love, a daughter is a trophy in an archery context, a teacher demands half of kingdom as his tuition fees, a student is turned away because of his caste and God is cursed with many more short stories. This mythology questions whole Hindu philosophy as neither the path of the knowledge nor that of devotion



towards actions in life need to be, or ordinarily us monotheistic in practice. Moreover, man's desires, needs, and sufferings are many and corresponding to these hosts of minor gods and sufferings as well as various incarnations, manifestations and aspects of the major gods. All these are united mythologically to one or the other major god. Krishna who is regarded as the God in the epic of Mahabharata, he is represented as a creator, diplomat and destroyer. At the end of this epic he as the supreme powerful and wise character in this epic is cursed and his whole dynasty gets destroyed due to civil war. Hence, the idea of supreme power is questioned and doubted when even Gods are cheaters and also destroyer. The Hindu mythology questions the Hindu philosophy. This mere idea is shown in this art.

The art contains important incidents which will show the minor and major important incidents where incarnation of God named Krishna who was charioteer in the war, shows how small his existence is as God in terms of this whole universe. It also will portray the phases of destruction and constructions are mere part of the universe and even Gods have duties to perform. Virtues like jealousy, anger, faith etc. are portrayed in human forms as a per easy form of human emotions which affects the actions during lifetime. Hence, this art work will be more focused on the universe and nature as part of Godly forces. The Vishwaroop which means the face of the universe is well explained in the epic in symbolic form. The philosophy behind the Vishwaroop when Krishna that leads antagonist and protagonist whom Hindus regard as the incarnation of Hindu God Vishnu is explaining another lead character named Arjuna before the war is the key factor in the epic Mahabharata. Here, the conversation between Arjuna and Krishna can be interpreted in various forms where Krishna explains Arjuna how important the actions are during lifetime. Here, Krishna is encouraging Arjuna to do his duties during war. Moreover, philosophically speaking, symbolically God is the source of destruction and also justice. These sources are very well found in the books of Vedas and religious interpretations. The sources of Mahabharata is well mentioned in the Bhagawat Gita and in Vedas. The philosophy mentioned in Mahabharata can also be related to the Cittavisudhhiprakaram from Buddhism which is in poetic form mentioned as:

They who do not see the truth,

Think of birth and death as distinct from Nirvana,

But they who see the truth,

Think of neither:

This discrimination is the demon  
 Who produces the ocean of transmigration?  
 Freed from it the great ones are released  
 From the bonds of becoming.

Plain folk are afflicted  
 With the poison of doubt  
 He who is all compassion  
 Should uproot it completely.

(Cittavisudhhiprakaram, pp.24-38).<sup>1</sup>

The above-mentioned poetry is taken from the books of Buddhism named Cittavisuddhprakasham. It agrees with the concept of Mahabharata with challenging logic against Hindu philosophy, as one's soul only has the right to judge about the guilt, ignorance and knowledge. As no one has the right over one's soul but that particular soul himself. This poetry in short, questions about the existence and also the knowledge one can bear in lifetime. Is there ultimate truth, is there ultimate good and evil? Or does the good and evil exist between human soul in itself, does one human soul have entire knowledge and power over universe? Hence, the philosophy of Mahabharata challenges the concept of good karma leads to good life. It is a question mark towards the idea of good and bad? God and evil? Mahabharata is the only epic which presents even Gods get cursed and there is no ultimate success and failures in life. It talks about the tragic circumstances which have leads the undesired consequences. Hence, the philosophy of Hinduism revolves around the concept of following actions. Doing the karma as the circumstances demand. It talks about there is no ultimate right or wrong but to survive. This concept is not mentioned in many religious books and never discussed. Hence, this reference from many interpretations are been studied and understood during this thesis process.

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<sup>1</sup> Cittavisudhhiprakam, pp24-38, W.M.Theodore de Bary, Stephen hay: Sources of Indian Tradition,1958. Pg. 197

## 4.2 MISINTERPRETED VIA SANSKRITIZATION OR HINDUIZATION THEORIES

The word Sanskritization was first coined by M.N.Srinivas in his dissertation which means gradual development within social class through Hindu theories. For instance, the gradual changes among Hindu castes creating sub castes such as vegetarianism, chanting of Sanskrit poems as mantras, caste classifications and methods of worshipping and significances. (Srinivas, M. N. 1952). Brahmins were the only caste who were privileged in learning Sanskrit and understanding the Vedas. The cult of Brahmins developed the culture of good and evil in Hinduism. (Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2000, pg 756-766.). The right and wrong among caste system in Hindu society is very black and white, meaning it has altered cults and methods of worshipping following good karma. Some examples are extreme in India, for instance cutting hair as part of holy devotee (Sinha, Surajit. 1962), sati system: burning living wife when the husband is dead is still followed in Rajasthan. (Berreman, Gerald D,pg. 366-391) These misinterpretations are the reasons for social problems and marginalization among men and women following this religion. (Pocock, D. F. 1955.) Sanskritization or Hinduization is the key point which has been studied during this thesis process and also questioned. (Barnabas, A. P. 1961) During the research process of preparing this thesis, Sanskrit poems were studied and interpreted in various ways. Mostly the Vedas or epic of Mahabharata is written in Sanskrit and in symbolic and poetic format. These writings are vulnerable towards interpretations. Additionally, only Brahmins were able to read and explain the Vedic texts which made them powerful to manipulate society as profit them. Hence, the Hinduization developed a cult which encouraged black and white interpretations in actions, Karmas which later became the ultimate interpretations and culture in Hindu society. (Narayana Rao, Velcheru. 1993, pg 85-100)

Agreeing with Brown, Carolyn Henning,1974; Sanskritization has various dimensions and impact towards culture and its consequences. Mahabharat is the epic which still fights the battle against these manipulative society. It is the epic where the protagonist of the story Krishna was born in royal family but was raised by the low caste, by race who herds cows. In the epic, it talks about the discrimination among the royal family members who spend life as a low caste citizen. It teaches society that caste do not make sense unless the act should be praised and considered as the class. This epic question the manipulative castes and criticized on various grounds, and alternatives have been proposed, all of which seem to suffer from similar limitations. One fundamental criticism is that the Brahmanical/Hindu/Sanskritic

culture is a totalizing, monolithic entity that is capable of overwriting other, “weaker” traditions, which are inherently disparate and vulnerable. (Dumont, Louis and D. Pocock. 195) . The fact about unity in diversity is common among Hinduization, (Fisher, William F. 2001.) however the consequences among extremist are still vigilant. For instance, in Nepal, people merely give importance to religion but to the culture. Religious significance do not make an impact on people but the meaning and the celebration does. This thesis will also embrace the potential of philosophical importance on life and death rather than the Hinduization. As this mythology has clear message to humanity, which is to live life and fight for its importance as far as one can. It agrees that there is no ultimate truth than birth and death. The rest are just part of the process towards death. Karma or actions are important as journey towards death. (Sontheimer. Günter-Dietz. 1989).

Sanskritization does not highlight anything about weaker version of Gods or deities, but only talks about the supreme power (Hiltebeitel, Alf, ed. 1989). Moreover, on studying Mahabharata and understanding Gita in its artistic form, the message is very simple, it refers Gods are not always right on their deeds too. The idea of Kshatriyas or Brahmins are not created by God but by the society which are human made society (Kulke, Hermann. 1976). Thus, even Gods are confused when coming to judgement and ruling human society. This painting questions human society is there any use of those class and caste which sees no meaning towards justice and crime? Is there any use of those cultural practices which does not respect humanity and solidarity? (Redfield, Robert. 1955). This product thesis will also discuss about the universe and nature as the supreme powerful God which has only one task to perform which is to change , develop and destroy. The concept of destruction as part of rebirth is explained in this thesis which is completely against Hinduization. (Singer, Milton. 1955). Hinduization, encourages cultural rites and traditions which is a bargain towards the deeds that a social being performs, for instance if someone in the family dies the ritual of charity and worshipping has to be performed once a year which follows many donations and charity (Pollock, Sheldon. 1995). It will also demand to perform those rituals with or without capacity, meaning it condemns people to feel sorry for the departed souls. Hence, it does not consist of anything spiritual or emotional about the culture but if fail in performing this ritual it can cause the fear of hell or omen (Raghavan, V. 1956.) Mahabharata is a Hindu epic which reveals death is the ultimate answer to the human sufferings. Hence, feeling sorry and depressed after death is mere waste of time on this earth because soul is immortal. These



theories of sanskritization is questioned and discussed during the thesis research and preparation.

### 4.3 THE THEORY TO UNDERSTAND THE UNDERSTANDING

Agreeing with Kantian theory analysis which ignores the fact of absolute right or wrong, the theory of work of art is not to have function. Additionally, ignoring even T.E Hulme, for whom artistic contemplation is a detached interest theory (W.Faulkner, 1950). Pierre Bourdieu 2005 disagrees with the old-fashioned theories of art, according to him art is a universal essence at the price of a double dehistoricization, of both the work and the gaze at work one very evidently situated in social space and in historical time. (Bourdieu 2005, pg.285). According to Harold Osborne, the aesthetic attitude is characterized by the concentration of attention, by the suspension of discursive and analytical activities where sociological and historical contexts are excluded, by the idea of indifference and detachment to the existence of the object. (M.Perry, 1976).

This theory also pins the idea of illusion of absolutism and analyses of essences. (Pierre Bourdieu, 2005, pg.286). For artist there is no absolutism, most of the interpretation in artist realm is based on its art and their self-understanding about essence in itself.

*‘If analyses of essence agree on what is essential, it is because what they have in common is to take as object, whether tacitly or explicitly the subjective experience of the work of art which is that of the analyst, meaning of a cultivated person of a certain society but essence or of the object to which it is that of analyst, meaning of a cultivated person of a certain society but they do not do so without paying attention to the historicity of the experience or the object to which it is applied .This means that they effect, unwittingly, a universalization of the particular case, and in the same way constitute a particular experience, situated and dated, of the work of art as a trans historic norm of all artistic perception.’ (Pierre Bourdieu, 2005. pg.286.).*

As an artist the understanding the concept of essence is changes according to the interpretation of an artist. Mahabharata and Vishwaroop is a process of contemporary visualization of Hindu epic which consist of moral values, philosophical grounds on life. The theory to understand the understanding also pins the idea of ignoring absolutism. There is no absolute right and wrong during interpretations, hence this thesis also embraces the theory of

illusion of absolutism. Agreeing with Jakobson what makes a verbal message a literary work which includes how to enclose themselves within the alternative of subjectivism or realism, corresponding as the aesthetic point of view which creates the artistic object or rather than it is the specific and intrinsic properties of the work of art which give rise to aesthetic experience. (Cf.J.R.Searle, 1983).

The visual interpretation of Vishwaroop: ‘the face of the universe’ is contemporary visualization which questions the absolutism and interprets the mythological Hindu epic source for many people who live their lives based on these epic and the morale which it conveyed through short stories. This thesis provides opportunities to interpret the small incidents present in the art for social and moral judgement. The theory of illusion of absolutism will be explained and interpreted. It embraces that science of artistic work cannot be divided into two parts, one devoted to production, and the other to perception. The principle of reflexivity asserts itself here when the science of art production corresponds to the meaning of its existence and also provides freedom of other critical analysis and critics among viewers.

## **5. LIMITATIONS**

### **5.1 SPACE AND TIME OBSTACLE**

For artist and for my project, I felt I was struggling with my limited time span. I think, if I have the freedom of time and the space, I would have utilized the opportunity with different perspectives. The concept of this work is to bind art, philosophy and culture under one panel. The task is to have visual narration of the epic in contemporary method.

The original plan was to paint the oil on canvas which was 285cm x 200cm big canvas. It had challenges when I started to paint. Due to space problem, I had problem finishing the canvas. The original canvas was big therefore fitting it in my apartment was difficult. Hence, I have to drop the idea of the canvas and complete it on the paper. The canvas on oil will be the project for 2020 summer. The pictures of initial phase.



Picture 12. Initial phase after putting the canvas on the wall with pencil drafts.



Picture 13. Canvas in Aalto studio after the first phase of painting.



Picture 14. Painting the first coat with the canvas in 2018.

The goal was to complete on canvas.





Picture 15. My pencil draft of the picture that is supposed to be paint on the canvas.



Picture 16. The paper draft was destroyed by mouse in Aalto studio. (The mouse ate the face of the universe)





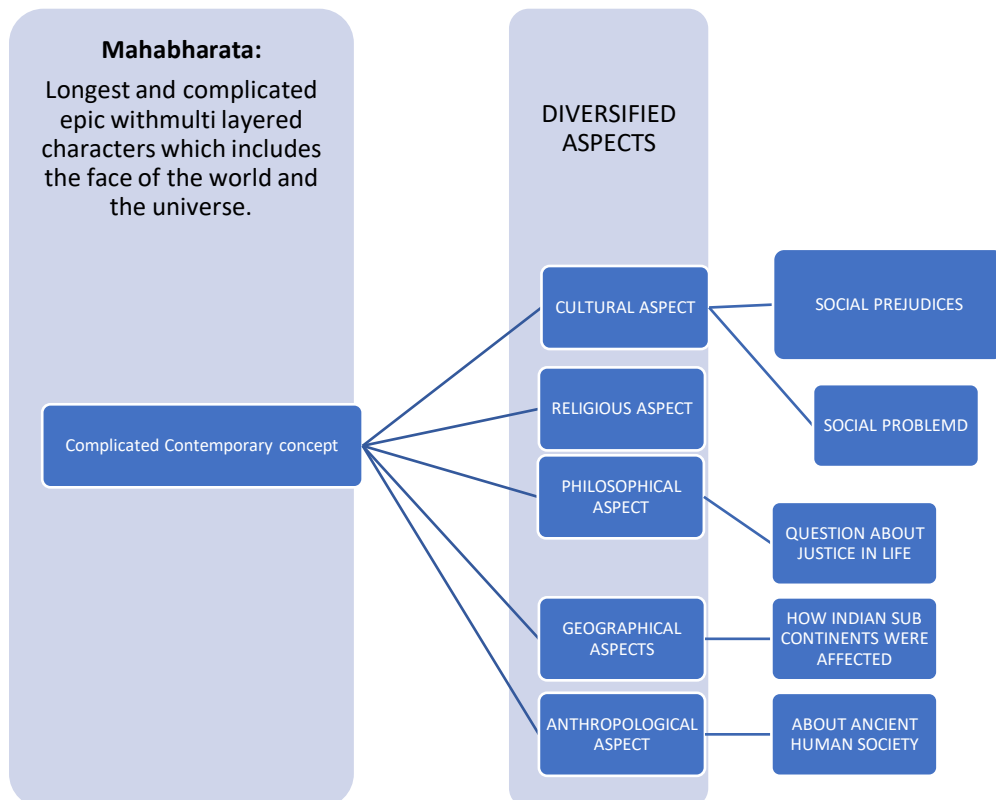
Picture 17. My final painting of Mahabharata in 2020

In the picture, the mouse ate the half part of the art and I have to re draw the draft again and paint it. Dur to time and space, this thesis was not able to be completed due to lack of suitable environment and resources. Also due to the time, the concept gradually developed into more vague and complicated form.

## 5.2 VAGUE TOPIC FOR INTERPRETATION

The epic as a whole was very vague topic to interpret with the contemporary ideas and limited secular opinions about this topic.

Philosophically, culturally, socio-geopolitically and scientifically this art work gradually developed within few years' time span. My concept about life, faith and art also changed slowly. Hence, this was impossible to put all the findings in my old draft. The idea of contemporary concept of the face of the universe was inspired by many sci-fi movies, contemporary comics and many more which can be explained in the chart below:





Picture 17: About diversified contemporary aspects of narration of Mahabharata. (From my learning diary, 2019)

### **5.3 LACK OF CONTEMPORARY IDENTICAL IDEAS**

Mahabharata is the originally religious epic which can be interpreted in various forms, for me it is the philosophical hand book about life and its use. Personally, this epic is not religious but a series of stories which are the model for futuristic society. The epic ends with the victory of Pandavas over Kauravs. This is the spiritual victory over injustice towards Pandavas. This basic story has no connection towards religion but while I was researching about Mahabharata, I only found details about Indian society, Indian religion and very much influential and misinterpreted forms of Gods in format of faith. Hence, the identical ideas which is secular and excludes about religion was very difficult to find and to relate.

However, I was very much influenced by the short stories by Devdutt Patnayak, 2010 an Indian mythologist who portrays the characters in humane and basic story telling forms. Even though, his theories and stories were only singing songs of India, when researched through Nepalese context, I found many short stories which was ignored. Nepali context is important because it gives secular opinion and format for this epic. Visually this epic was important for me to explain because the short stories had more to offer philosophically and socially than religiously.

### **5.4 LACK OF SECULAR LITERATURES FOR REFERENCES AND ANALYSIS**

When researching about literatures and references, I found mostly arts influenced from influenced artist Ravi Varma. The secular visual literatures were nowhere to be found. Hence, it was a challenge for me to stick to the idea where I could relate with the ancient literature and the visual references for this painting. Therefore, I found old masters and my experiences when travelling around Europe and Asia to paint the characters of the epic.

## 5.5 SELF-DOUBT AND CRITICAL ABOUT THE WORK

All the three years of studying since 2017 August to 2020 January, the topic were not only vague but it was very articulate about aesthetic presence of life. It had the high and low pitch about making human life complicated and tranquil at the same time. It is the fascinating literature which makes human behavior and action minimalistic. It does not value much about the emotions that humans go through but its emphases on good or ethical actions when living life. However, the process of researching during the research period made me critically analytical about my work tools and the boundaries that I was using for making the final painting. Every time I analyzed different researches on the epic, I found different perspectives of same version. Therefore, it slowed my work on canvas painting and also made me self-critical about my work.

## 6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

### 6.1 SECULAR SYNOPSIS ON THE EPIC MAHABHARATA

*‘High above the sky stands in Swarga paradise abode of the gods;*

*Still above is Vaikuntha heaven abode of God.*

*The door keepers of Vaikuntha are the twins Jaya and Vijaya:*

*Both whose names means victory! One keeps you in Swarga the other raises you into Vaikuntha.*

*In vaikuntha there is bliss forever, in Swarga there is pleasure for only as long as you deserve.*

*What is the difference between Jaya and Vijaya?*

*Solve this puzzle and you will solve the mystery of Mahabharat’.*

*-Devduth Patnayak 2020, coverpage.*

In the enthralling retelling of the Hindus greatest epic, the Mahabharata, seamlessly weaves into a single narrative plots from classic mythology as well as its many folk and regional variants.

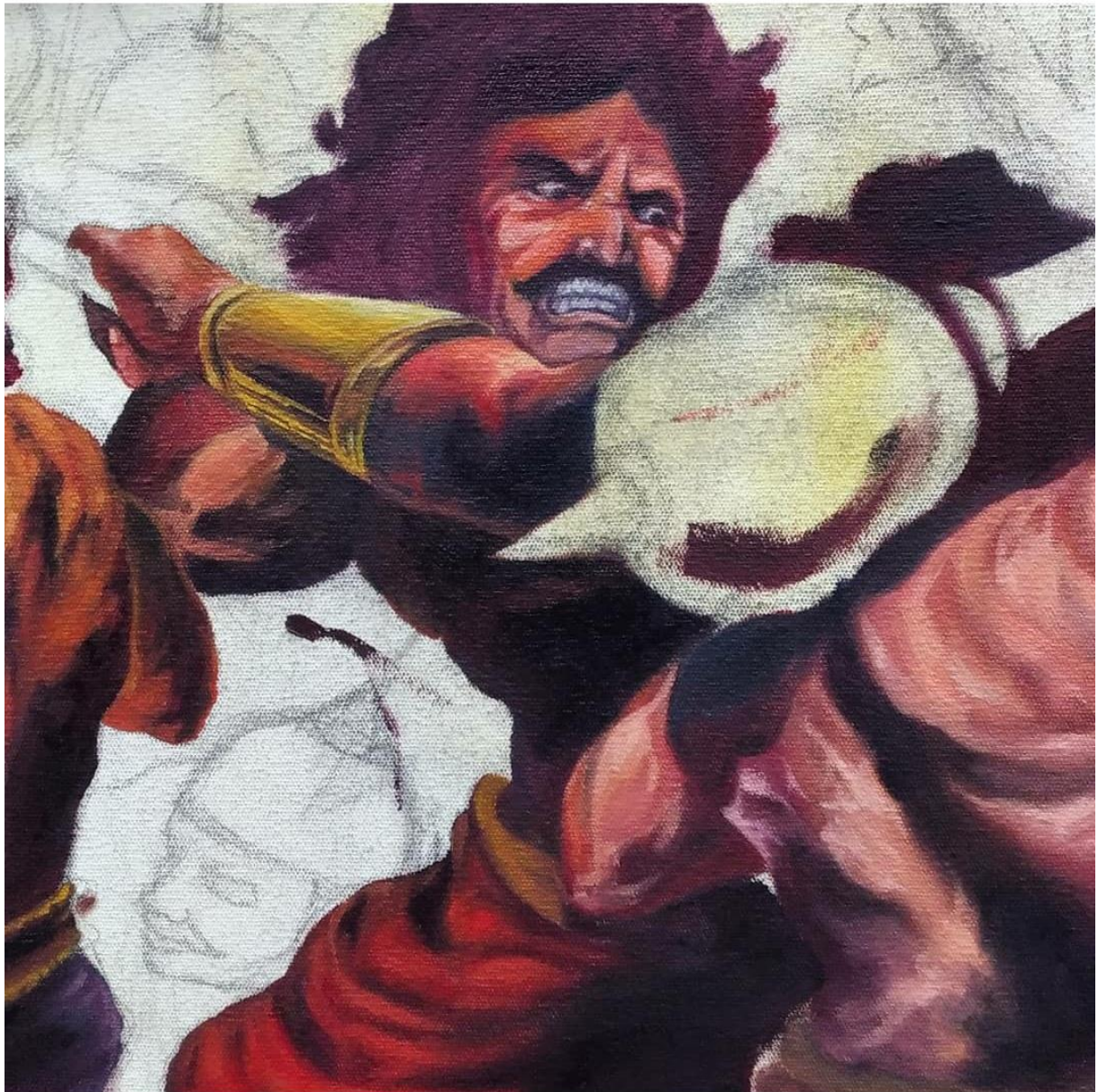
Richly illustrated with over thousand-line drawings and six different chapters abound with little known details such as the names of the hundred Kauravas and Pandavas. The war between these two relatives named as the biggest war of that era. With clarity and simplicity, the tales in the elegant volume is revealed the eternal relevance of the Mahabharata the complex and disturbing mediation on the human condition that has shaped for over 3000 years.

This epic Mahabharata is taken from the famous religious scripture Bhagawat Geeta because it is the conversation about nature and universe to life and death. Rationalist wonder how such a long discourse took place

### 6.1.2 THE WAR: MAHABHARATA



Picture 18, Details sketch of battle between Pandavas (Bhima) Kaurava (Dhuryadhan), 2020.



Picture 19. detail oil on Canvas, 2018.

Mahabharat is philosophy foundation to modern Hindu society. When explaining to modern world extracting religion from this beautiful epic, only philosophies and shredded light perspectives on life is found. It is believed that epic is written evidence of real war that was fought from the area of modern-day Delhi and Haryana ranging to flat lands of Nepal. This epic's speciality is it represents story which can be related to any family, country, society in general for future and also during 3000 CE era. Mahabharat is an epic which revolves around the kingdom Hastinapur. This story is about royal family in prosperous kingdom, with



complications of relationship and circumstances. It is a unique mythology which is the foundation of modern Hindu society.

### **6.1.3 THE BLOOD BATH**

The blood bath is the foundation part of the painting. It has grief, dead and bloodshed in the painting. It is the crucial part of the painting which signifies the ending. When the death happens, it follows with human emotions and virtues of letting go of the departed souls. However, the conclusion of the life does not always justify the lived life. Hence, the death of Bhishma is a symbol to the collective human society where death is equal to every being.

Personally, I feel in order to cherish life the meaning of death is crucial. During life process we forget about the fact that every living thing has an end. Hence, this fact is followed by series of human emotions when living being is dead. This idea of bloodshed is discussed in this part of the thesis and symbolizes that for nature it is a mere routine cycle and it does not judge any part of life timeline. Thus, when dying it does not mean anything how and what we did during our life span. Kings and Beggars will die and the process of death for everyone is same. The blood bath is very horrific but at the same time it is fair and linear to every living being.

## **6.2 ART WORK AND ITS REPRESENTATION**

### **6.2.1 ECLECTIC CITATIONS**

Agreeing with Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C.Steel, 2003.:The production of Hindu cultic and mythological imagery underwent a major aesthetic and conceptual transformation during the nineteenth century. The art pedagogy of perspectives and realism endowed the idealized traditional imagery and more tangible and sensual presence. When Indus valley civilization area were under colonial influence, Hindu art and imagery were only the form which could affect and influence people and culture together. The mass production and its circulation became potential instrument for the seizure of aesthetic and cultural meaning in the times to

follow. The eclecticism of visuality also led to piling of images from diverse visual sources on one visual plane and brought into effect an ambivalent language of images and citation facilitating juxtaposition of cultural and religious. Asian and western traditional and modern sacred and philosophical elements on a single receptor surface.

The Indian artist Ravi Varma (1848-1906) and several other Nepalese- Chinese artists Araniko appropriated a range of heterogenous scenes and images from across genres and decontextualized them in the overall scheme of their Hindu cultic, and mythological paintings. The technique of archiving elements from different visual sources to create ambivalent spaces in which mixed cultural responses could be evolved at will soon became the standard idiom of picture construction.

The imagery illustration became all the more obvious in the formal aspect of Ravi Varma's painting when in the culling out of an image belonging to a different pictorial source and with its individual perspectives context and its placement in his own pictorial scheme, the requisite foreshortening did not get adjusted, making the image appear out of proportion, Ravi Varma's pictures are clearly informed by the visual contexts of the political and theatrical model.

His art work approves that an artistic representation and symbolistic popularity affects the beliefs and faith in which society function. Even today, Hindu society imagines Hindu Gods with golden crown and goddess with long hair and beautiful sari. These are historical errors when society was so patriarchal and contrasted within power and politics. My thesis has tried to have a contemporary product following the reference from western art and also ancient Hindu artists from Nepal and India.

My work is an effort to cross all boundaries of the religious and cultural ancient symbolism where people imagine Mahabharata as a cultic and mystic Hindu epic. I have experimented modern dress codes, scientific spaceships and satellites images, dragons, zombies and Greek God images during the preparation of illustration which have many complicated shades of the characters. This painting complied philosophical and scientific modifications of Mahabharata where face of universe: Vishwaroop is explained as the natural process: referring. When thinking about life and death in the bigger picture; morale, culture and human virtues mean nothing but phases of our lives. The thesis surfaces philosophical, political and historical cultic and epic layers which will be presented visually.

### 6.2.2 DIAGNOSING THE SOURCES OF VIOLENCE

The visual narration contains violence and war in its background, because Mahabharata is a name of the biggest battle. Hence, the source of the violence in the epic itself. However, when answering why it is essential to paint deaths and violence, agreeing with Ravi Vasudevan 2002, pg100., if the violent resonances of the contemporary art have series of sources ranging from the complicated transformations of the city through to entanglements of land, human mankind movements, it is nevertheless the changes of religious chauvinism that provides an epochal transformation in the violent contours of contemporary society.

The concept of war in this painting is visually narrative; meaning creation and destruction is part of the change which is essential for development of the universe. The illustration shows the series of deaths and killings of important characters of the epic which are tragic and full of controversial background.

Philosophically, the source of violence is a symbolic representation of destruction. The heroes of the stories who is every single character are fighting within each other just to regain the power and to become the supreme: which is the source of every war in this world history. Hence, it is symbolic that war brings destruction which is meaningless, because war or peace universe is not interested in the unwanted ego and eccentric behavior of mankind but it embraces the war or peace in its own form.

### 6.2.3 THE TRANSGRESSIVE EMBRACE

This product thesis clears that the technique of collage was used to bring about picture plane a degree of ambivalence, illusion, duplicity, opposition and transgression with regard to the setting and the characters moving in it. The idea of supreme power and the ideology of 'The one' or 'The god' has made people blind and also biased. When reading Upanishads (religious books where Gods are described properly in poetic form) Gods can be visualized as cunning and ugly looking characters. However, artists in 19<sup>th</sup> century painted Gods in the best-looking humans, the Gods in Greece, Italy or in India they were perfectly looking and beautiful creatures. Till this day, when any one with faith is given opportunity to paint God in their eyes, they will never paint their respective God in ugly looking creature. This concept was very striking and very evident to me during the preparation of thesis.

In the epic when Krishna explains Arjuna that life and death are part of the universal wheel. Arjuna requests Krishna to show his Godly face, according to the epic: Krishna shows Arjuna the scariest face of himself. This short tale changed my perspectives about traditional perspectives. When we imagine God and their face visually speaking they can be good looking, but have we ever seen God in real? When painting faces of universe and faces of all the faith, I tried my best to cover all races and elements as possible.

When researching about the Indian and Nepalese Artist, Indian artists like Ravi Verma, tried to make God as King characters because he was politically bounded to work for the kings and Royals. Similarly, if we look at the Nepalese traditional art, Gods are painted as the ghosts and scary characters with long claws and long teeth. Hence, this visual language has changed the idea and perspectives of society and cultural viewpoint. My illustration will embrace the transgressive viewpoints of the Hindu society. It will portray traditional art, symbolic art with contemporary minimalism in the background.

## 6.3 CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

### 6.3.1 CONCEPT AESTHETICS

A visual element, as anything related to human perception is perceived differently from one person to the their depending on individual mental associations and on the cultural context in which the individual is immersed. Aesthetics experiences but seeks which ever Plato have been discussed in relation to beauty and perception, refer to the emotional reaction that an individual has after an object or a representation of an object. It is an interactive experience between the individual and the object, or more likely the, ‘interdependence among the elements of object.’ (Moynihan and Mehrabian 1981, pg. 323) From the motivational perspective, the aspects of the aesthetic play an important role, as it is related to human emotional activity, something that is subjective, but the same time aims at being shard. I tried to avoid the cliché of design that represents beauty and common to general ideas and norms but to express the freedom of its own beauty and expressions.

This thesis highlights the tranquil of freedom and experiments with colors and visual language in normal mindset. The scary and furious illustration represents beauty and face of nature. The illustration will focus on the cultural aspects of peace and life through the layered narrative storyline. The colors and the epic will be explained but using the sources of violence and war as a symbol of peace and freedom. This contemporary symbolic art material will possess story



with moral science behind, symbolic portrayal of aesthetic culture and ancient traditions. It will also present the barbaric human nature for killing and be killed for power and politics. It is the mash up stories with narration and science of consciousness and morality.

My work will endure the aesthetic concept in philosophical means, the beauty and ugliness are so prejudiced. For common minds, the difference between good and bad, right and wrong is normal as it can be but when we analyze via perspectives the story can go upside down. Hence, it gives opportunities to discuss and see the dark sides of Godly characters and also the demonic version of the same characters.

Beauty of any incident completely depends of the perspectives and background information. The judgmental and prejudices values which we inherited from our society is the reason of rules and regulations which we follow without thinking. This painting which have faces of universe as the demonic looks, psychedelic, electro magnifying etc. these looks are illustrated under one panel. Thus, the ideology is to use our own understanding and perspectives to analyze circumstances and be free from prejudices. Why black is color of bad and sadness, why yellow signifies happiness and luck? Etc. these aesthetic queries will be discussed and illustrated in this thesis.

## **6.4 REPRESENTATION OF VISUAL CONTEMPORARY ART**

### **6.4.1 VISUAL NARRATION UNDER ONE PANEL**

I have taken references from Nepali, Newari, Tibetan and Indian art culture for my work. The diverse knowledge and social differences are presented in this art work, where all the characters and different sets of incidents which questions the morality, faith and justice is presented.

I personally, found this process very complicated and also incomplete in some point because, Mahabharata is a complex epic, so every narration feels incomplete without another incident interlinked. Hence, the choices of the incidents and characters which are mentioned in the painting is very particularly explained.

I feel, due to the socio-political background and colonial political history in India, the art crafts and details of Mahabharata were biased and also very superficially misinterpreted in society of India. However, Nepal being one of the sovereign countries and fancying in art and crafts was able to maintain the history and art work in its own geographical territory. This

complex mixture of culture, color and also the characters of Mahabharata and the explanation of face of universe is explained in my work.

Putting all important incidents which represents virtues, incidents and philosophy from one epic is itself a contemporary idea. This art work has traditional illustration but consist symbolic representations

#### **6.4.2 STORY TELLING THROUGH ILLUSTRATION**

Mahabharata is a complex epic with many characters and relationship complications which will make them more interlinked. The stories consist of taboo in today's modern societies, social issues such as gambling, domestic violence, corruption, sexism, transgender and war etc. These all elements make the story telling interesting and also very contemporary when 3000 years old society had very similar problems which we are facing this day.

The story telling of my work is not only crucial but without non-South Asian audience will have difficult in understanding. This is the epic which consist of many layers with grey characters because it can be presented in any form and interpreted in different perspectives.

For instance, in my art work there is a visual illustration of lady drowning new born baby and man behind her is trying to stop. For the very second in this one collage: anyone looking at the picture can say that this is altered insanity when a mother is drowning her own sons in the ocean and the father is numb and silent. But the retelling of this epic will explain it that the child was symbol of curse and the mother was reincarnation of the ocean (The Ganges) herself. Mother was making easy favor for the king and all she wanted to do was take care of her sons by herself. Later, the last son which was saved by the king becomes the prince which was later promises to die virgin making the kingdom with no dynasty. Hence, this small incident becomes one of the crucial reasons for this epic and the biggest war.

Futhermore, this will be the verbal expression towards the illustration and contemporary reasons for the war and the reasons behind. It will also provide open platform for discussions such as about good and evil, what was justice and how was it served? Whom to blame for the war Mahabharata? These questions will be openly discussed in the story telling. It embraces socio-political, geographical, social problems etc. which also existed 3000 years ago.

### 6.4.3 RAP SONG FOR MAHABHARATA

Rap which means Rhythm and poetry. It is the modern method of concluding this epic which will highlight the main incident in humorous and satirical way. This is my conclusion where I push boundaries of modern interpretation of the epic providing synopsis. Since Mahabharata is an epic poem, I aimed to pay its tribute in poetic and musical gesture. The lyrics of my rap song is as follows:

(verse 1)

Its da mister maha bhisma, who gave up sex  
 For his father, so he can marry next  
 Makes no sense but be patience  
 Keep the essence and its relations  
 While a daughter is lot a reward in a test  
 Bless by the other guest, picture the politics  
 Or is it the story and its shapes  
 Complicates all new shades  
 Cuz i try to handle this like an analyst,  
 Where guru demands half of land for his bless  
 As a trainee gets many shades for his class  
 Knowing he had a super power vest for his past  
 And mother request her son to share a wife  
 (what) a blast  
 And a wife blindfold, herself to hide her eyes  
 Cuz her man's blind since i need to analyze  
 Holding golden crown but his heart is cold as ice  
 Where A man let another man to have his wife  
 Just to get her baby and its ancient science

(Verse 2)

This is witnessing the forest blown to city  
 If you ask humanity, it has their necessity  
 Whose bad whose pretty whose young whose steady  
 Lot a question, may be there's a answer already.  
 But over in heritage, family ain't gonna change  
 Some avenge to pretend on a game for revenge  
 Manipulating king taken his place and been played

Hatred seems plague to renegade with a blade  
 A prince pretends to loose and queen forces to maid  
 Lady publicly disrobed whose never been afraid  
 Until tears from people eyes still publicly stares  
 Her men insanely rage, though don't gotta be real  
 So many mis-inter-pret and some are disappear  
 Quest to seek some answers which are still unclear  
 While the way of repetition in enormous rate  
 Birth and dead all i can see in everyone's head  
 This war won't make us free but truth will liberate  
 And for humankind this big epic was made  
 Cuz the system and its phase battle 4 fools  
 But they fought war with the rage but with no rules

(Verse 3)

Victor lose to pain vanquished goes to paradise  
 Brother killing brothers how we suppose to realize  
 It could be stopped before anyone's dies  
 Steel of different sides paying a price  
 But like it's your words against your odds  
 God is cursed and judged I don't know what is worse  
 Well Heaven or hell No one can tell  
 To be on top actually you gotta fail  
 So much to inhale that what makes you real  
 Until wisdom prevails, until wisdom prevails,

With this written report of my art work, I will attach the lyrics and rap song. I have added B.R Chopra's Mahabharata, 1988; music hymn in the beginning of my music to provide the essence of ancient yet contemporary form of Mahabharata in the beginning of the music. The concept about making this song is to have necessity in brutal honesty. The musical humor is also contemporary form of art. Hence, this will focus on the complicated incidents in the form of rap song.



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